

Tooting and Mitcham 1, Wycombe Wanderers 1.

WITH the Isthmian League title decided long ago, there was little to play for when Wycombe Wanderers lined up for their final league match of the season at Sandy Lane, Tooting on Tuesday night.

The situation was ripe for one of those famous "typical end of season" matches. But the outcome was something completely the opposite and it turned out to be one of Wanderers' best games of the season. The couple of hundred followers that saw the game will remember it throughout the close season — it was that good.

Played at a blistering pace, the finale produced some superb football from both sides and in the end, few would argue about the result.

Again Wycombe created a whole host of chances and on simple opportunities they should have won. But the way Tooting, sixth in the table, kept battling away in search of an equaliser, was highly commendable.

The game was almost devoid of fouls, except for the odd

professional offence like shirt pulling. It was a real spectacle.

There were some interesting parallels between the sides. Both defences looked weak, but both sets of forwards were eager for goals while the midfield battle was pretty even.

But the man who eventually swung the game in Wycombe's favour was Mick Holifield. Out of the side for the majority of the term, Mick has recently come into midfield and made a quiet impression. On Tuesday though, he played probably his best ever game for the Blues and hardly put a foot wrong all night. It was the sort of form that augers extremely well for next season.

Dave Bullock returned to the side with Alan Gane and Holifield retaining their midfield positions as Rob Williams was unavailable. From the outset Wanderers were soon linking well, stringing long, accurate passes together. When Tooting replied Holifield, Gane and Larry Pritchard were always willing to come back and support in defence.

Alan Ives, however, one of two Tooting men in the England touring squad, was always a constant danger to the Wycombe

rearguard. He made the back four look square at times and set up chances regularly. It was his presence above all that gave Delaney and Bullock such a torrid first 45 minutes when they both looked strangely out of touch.

Both sides went close but it was Wanderers who went ahead in the 28th minute with a great goal from Keith Searle. Tony Horseman brought the ball under control and timed his lob beautifully to Searle who chested the ball down and lashed it wide of goalkeeper Dave Cobb, on the volley.

But in the 35th minute Tooting showed their opponents they were still very much in the game when Ives crossed perfectly for Dave Juneman, but Peter Spittle was well positioned to save his header at the near post.

If the first half had been good, the second was even better. Tooting were re-inforced by substitute Ray Major who spent much of his time upfront, giving them four forwards. It took him only a few seconds to stamp his mark on the game when he curled a 45 yard pass right across the pitch to Chris Barrett who clipped the ball into the middle

only for Juneman to shoot just wide.

Then in the 50th minute an equally fine ball from Holifield gave Swain the room to show his paces but Cobb nipped out to save his shot.

From these two moves alone, it was obvious that both sides were resigned to the aim of finishing on a bright note. It was a pleasure to witness two teams totally dedicated to playing attractive and constructive football — a rare sight these days.

After 56 minutes Bullock almost let in Ives when Spittle was slow coming off his line but the Tooting man's shot skidded past the post. Bullock, soon made amends, however, by clearing the ball off the line from Juneman after Delaney's pass back was intercepted by the ever dangerous Ives.

The pace and standard of the game did not drop for even a second in the half as play surged from end to end. In the 28th minute Derek Gamblin gave away a free kick on the left at the angle of the penalty box and when everyone was expecting a cross, Bobby Green fired in a tremendous volley which cannoned off the crossbar with Spittle left helpless.

Seconds later Holifield stretched Cobb with a rising drive and then Searle had the ball in the net only for referee Bune to disallow the effort.

Brian Langfield, out of the side in recent weeks, replaced Horseman after 76 minutes, possibly "Bodger's" last Isthmian appearance of his distinguished career.

In the final ten minutes Wanderers had a couple of chances to sew the game up once and for all. One man prevented just that, however, Dave Cobb. He pulled off two tremendous saves to keep Tooting in the match and from his efforts, they were able to snatch an equaliser later on.

Cobb's first save, from Searle was truly remarkable. Swain's corner came out to Searle just inside the box. Keith fired in a shot with tremendous power but Cobb tipped the rocket over the top. Then Swain broke through after a series of interpassing but again Cobb turned his drive away with his finger tips.

Just when it seemed Wanderers had done enough, Tooting broke through with five minutes to go. Major was the man who did the damage but again Spittle was slow in coming for the ball and Major nipped in between Bullock and the keeper to put the ball home.

In the remaining minutes Swain and Searle both could have scored for Wycombe to clinch victory but Swain was again thwarted by Cobb as a full stretch while Searle sent a shot wide after sweeping through the defence.

No-one really minded, however, for the real winner on Tuesday night was, of course, football. S.E.

TOOTING: D. Cobb, W. Smith, K. Sheehan, D. Clark, J. Wareing (sub R. Major 45 mins), A. Berreclough, E. Webb, D. Juneman, C. Barrett, A. Ives.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, D. Gamblin, D. Bullock, J. Delaney, P. Birdseye, A. Gane, L. Pritchard, M. Holifield, A. Horseman (sub B. Langfield 76 mins), K. Searle, K. Swain.

Referee: T. Bune.

Half-time: 0-1. Goalscorers, Wycombe — Searle (28), Tooting — Major (87).